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**Statement of Chairman Joel Hefley
Subcommittee on Military Installations and Facilities**

**National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001
Division B—Military Construction Authorizations**

This afternoon, the Subcommittee on Military Installations and Facilities meets to consider the authorizations for the military construction and military family housing programs of the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2001 and related items. The legislation we will consider today will be incorporated into H.R. 4205, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001, as Division B. At the appropriate time, I will open the mark to amendment at any point. First, however, I want to make a few observations.

In one very important respect, the budget request was a marked improvement over the submission made by the Department one year ago. The Department of Defense heeded the overwhelming rejection by the Congress of outlay rate-based incremental funding. Unfortunately, this year's budget request continued the broad trend that began with the fiscal year 1996 MILCON program. The Department of Defense requested fewer total dollars for these key infrastructure accounts than was enacted by the Congress the year before. The Department's budget request of \$8.03 billion for the MILCON program was 4 percent below current spending levels and 5.5 percent below the levels authorized for appropriations in the current fiscal year. More significantly, the budget request was 25 percent below the funding level requested by the Department for fiscal year 1996 when I assumed the chairmanship of this subcommittee.

While the Department of Defense has consistently underfunded the military construction and military family housing programs, this subcommittee has played a key, bipartisan role in addressing the needs of military personnel and their families. I am especially proud of the commitment of the membership to acquire decent housing, improved child development centers, and other quality-of-life improvements for those who volunteer in our defense. We have also worked very hard to improve facilities supporting military training and readiness and have provided for necessary withdrawals of the public lands to allow the military services to train and to be ready to fight the Nation's wars. Finding the resources has not always been easy, but we have done so. And, we have done so in a spirit of cooperation and a commitment to solve problems. At the conclusion of this Congress, I will turn over the gavel of this subcommittee to another member of this House – a Republican, I trust – but, as a member of this committee, I will not be far from the central issues on which we have all worked over the years.

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The Chairman's Mark before the members would, if adopted, continue our efforts both to provide additional investment in military infrastructure and to continue innovation in facilities acquisition and management.

On the investment side of the ledger, the Chairman's Mark would commit approximately \$8.43 billion to the military construction and military family housing programs for the coming fiscal year. Although this subcommittee would prefer to do more, we recognize the imperative to balance the unmet needs in the infrastructure arena with the additional and growing list of unfunded modernization, readiness, and personnel requirements confronting the military services.

On the innovation side of the ledger, the recommendations in the Chairman's Mark would accomplish a number of important goals. First, the recommendations before the subcommittee would extend for an additional five-year period the authorities contained in the Military Housing Privatization Initiative. While implementation of military housing privatization has been slow, the limited experience of each of the military services shows great promise. This is a critical initiative and one this subcommittee has strongly supported. Second, the Chairman's Mark would provide more flexibility to the Department to manage its real property assets. Third, the recommendations before the members would enhance the disposal of certain base closure properties, and, finally, the Chairman's Mark would ensure adequate recognition of state regulatory authority in the privatization of military utility system infrastructure.

Before I conclude my remarks, I want to spend a moment on a subject matter of great interest to a number of members. The Chairman's Mark is silent, in general, on the question of the training of military personnel on Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, and, specifically, on the narrower question of the proposal of the Administration to dispose of certain real property. In my personal judgment, the Secretary of the Navy should retain any and all lands within the Eastern Maneuver Area or the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility. Those facilities are essential to the adequate training of naval personnel. It is a training environment that cannot be replicated. While I understand that the Department of the Navy no longer requires property comprising the Naval Ammunition Support Detachment on the western end of Vieques Island, I do not believe that property should be disposed until training resumes on the eastern end of the island. If this were solely a matter of imposing conditions on land conveyances, I would recommend action to the subcommittee. However, in recognition of the additional readiness and training issues inherent in this subject, I have elected to defer action until the full committee meets next week. I know there are strongly held views on this subject on both sides, but I believe that, by proceeding in the full committee, we can have the thorough and comprehensive debate this matter requires.

In closing, I want to express again my appreciation to the members of the subcommittee, past and present, who have contributed to the work we have done together over the past six years. I am grateful for the support and counsel of Neil Abercrombie and Solomon Ortiz, former ranking members of the subcommittee who remain valuable contributors to our deliberations. In the tradition of bipartisanship we have enjoyed, I have also enjoyed my on-going working relationship with the current ranking Democratic member, Gene Taylor. He is to be commended for his willingness to work together for the common good in meeting the defense infrastructure needs of the Nation. Finally, I would be remiss in this forum if I did not acknowledge the contributions of Tillie Fowler who has been a confidant in this work of this subcommittee and a good friend. I regret her decision to retire from the House, but I hope not from public service.

This is truly a bipartisan effort and I urge all members to join in support of this legislation.

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